new universe™

THE LAST ISSUE OF CODENAME SPITFIRE™

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HER NAME IS CELIA CLIFF AND SHE IS EMPLOYED BY THE C.I.A. THREE WEEKS AGO SHE INVESTIGATED A PRIVATE RESEARCH PROJECT, COMMANDED SINISTRY, BASED ON THIS ISLAND. TWO DAYS AGO SHE DISCOVERED HER HOME RANSACKED.

SHE FLED INTO THE JUNGLE WITH ONLY AN OVERNIGHT BAG.

ONE HOUR AGO SHE ABANDONED ALL SHE WAS CARRYING WHEN THE SOUND OF CRASHING FOLIAGE ANCHOR HER.

ADRENALIN HAS BEEN PUMPING STEADILY INTO HER BLOOD SYSTEM EVER SINCE. BUT NOW EXHAUSTION IS TAKING ITS TOLL. NOW, AT HER MOST DESPERATE MOMENT, THE JUNGLE ITSELF SEEMS TO CONSPIRE AGAINST HER.

ITS SERPENTINE COILS SLOWLY DRAW ABOUT HER, CONFINING HER MOVEMENTS.

CONSTRICTING, EVER CONSTRICTING...

HER CHANCES FOR SURVIVAL GROWING EVER MORE REMOTE. IN THIS GARDEN, ALL HOPE IS LOST.

SHE DOES NOT KNOW FOR WHOSE SINS SHE IS BEING PUNISHED, BUT WHEN SHE REGAINS HER FOOTING AND LOOKS UP AGAIN...

SHE SEES THE DEVIL HAS COME DRESSED IN COLD STEEL!

HER TREMBLING HAND SQUEEZES OFF THE BULLETS, BUT SHE FIRES OUT OF SHEER DESPERATION, KNOWING IT WILL DO NO GOOD.

WHY HE DOESN'T KILL HER RIGHT THEN AND THERE SHE DOESN'T KNOW, BUT SHE PRAYS HE WOULD. HIS STRENGTH IS HORRIFYING, HIS SPEED UNMEASURABLE.

THEY RISE SWIFTLY ABOVE THE JUNGLE'S CANOPY. WITHIN MOMENTS, CELIA HAS LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

A LEADEN SKY HANGS OVER ARLINGTON, AND AN UNREASONABLY COLD WIND BLOWS DOWN ITS AVENUES, FULL OF FOUL OMENS AND PORTENT.

OUR LAST TRANSMISSION FROM CLIFF WAS ONLY OF MARGINAL VALUE. SHE WAS OBVIOUSLY UNDER STRESS.

ST. JOHN- THAT'S HIS NAME, ISN'T IT? THE GUY WHO'S DEVELOPING THE SYNERGY TECHNOLOGY?

SAXON ST. JOHN, YES. FREE-LANCE MEMBER OF THE CLUB. HE'S BEEN STATIONED ON PUERTO ROJO FOR OVER THREE YEARS NOW.

HE'S BEEN DOING R AND D WORK ON SUITS STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO OUR OWN M.A.X. SYSTEM. AND NOW WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT IT'S ACTUALLY QUITE IN ADVANCE OF OURS.

THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, THE CLUB, IS FINANCING HIM. AND WE HAVE REPORTS OF MASSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.

HE'S A CLEAR THREAT TO OUR NATIONAL SECURITY. BUT PUERTO ROJO IS POLITICALLY NEUTRAL, WON'T ALLOW ANY U.S. OR SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL ON IT'S TERRITORY.

SO THE ONLY INFORMATION WE HAVE TO GO ON IS FROM OUR OPERATIVES.

AND THE ONLY MEANS WE HAVE OF PREVENTING THE SYNERGY PROJECT FROM BEING SOLD TO THE CLUB IS A SMALL, COVERT OPERATION.

LOOK, EDMUND, I DON'T HAVE MUCH EXPERIANCE WITH THIS "SPY-VS.-SPY" STUFF...

YOU'LL BE GIVEN A NEW SUIT-QUITE AN IMPROVEMENT OVER THE OTHERS, AND A PARTNER FOR THE JOB. JAKE'S STILL RECOVERING FROM HIS INJURIES. WE DON'T HAVE ANYONE ELSE TO TURN TO. IN THE M.A.X. SUIT YOU'RE EQUAL TO A SMALL ARMY... AND THAT'S WHAT IT'LL TAKE TO STOP ST. JOHN.

OKAY, EDMUND, OKAY. BUT WHY ARE WE STOPPING HERE? I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO SHOW ME THE NEW SUIT AT THE LAB.

AS THEY SAY, "SKIMMED MILK OFTEN MASQUERADES AS CREAM." WILLY DEERE'S BEEN WORKING OUT OF THIS BASEMENT FOR YEARS. THIS NEIGHBORHOOD IS THE PERFECT COVER.

WILLY! HELLO, WILLY! CAN'T HEAR US OVER THE WELDING.

SO THIS IS THE C.I.A.'S ANSWER TO DR. ZARKOV?

NOW DON'T GO MAKING ANY HASTY JUDGMENTS. HE'S CONTRIBUTED TO HALF OF THIS COUNTRY'S MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN ROBOTICS FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS.

WELL HEY, ROTH. DIDN'T EXPECT YOU SO EARLY. EXCUSE THE MESS- MAID DOESN'T COME TILL TUESDAY.

NEVER MIND THAT. I WANT YOU TO MEET A VERY SPECIAL WOMAN.

JENNY SWENSEN, ISN'T IT? YES I'VE HEARD ABOUT YOU, AND YOUR FATHER, OF COURSE. I'VE BEEN WORKING WITH HIS NOTES ON M.A.X. TECHNOLOGY FOR SOME TIME NOW.

JENNY WILL BE YOUR PARTNER ON THIS ASSIGNMENT.

EXCUSE ME FOR BEING BLUNT, MR. DEERE, BUT I THOUGHT THE AGENCY KEPT THE BRAINY TYPES LIKE YOU UNDER LOCK AND KEY...

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES THEY WOULD, BUT ST. JOHN AND SYNERGY POSE A GREAT THREAT TO THE BALANCE OF POWER. I FOLLOWED HIS MONOGRAPHS ON CYBERNETICS BEFORE HE WENT UNDERGROUND.

HE'S AS BRILLIANT AS HE IS DERANGED. FORTUNATELY, HIS PARANOIA PREVENTS HIM FROM SHARING HIS WORK WITH OTHERS. IF WE CAN DESTROY HIS OWN DATA BANKS, HE'LL BE FINISHED.

WE'RE UP AGAINST STIFF ODDS, BUT I'M HOPING THE NEW SUIT WILL HELP BALANCE THINGS OUT A BIT. OVER HERE.

THE NEW DESIGN IS FAR MORE MANEUVERABLE THAN THE OTHERS. THE JETS ARE MOUNTED ON THE BACK AND LASERS ARE MOUNTED ON THE WRISTS.

IT'S LIGHTER THAN THE REST, BUT THE STRENGTH AMPLIFICATION IS AT LEAST THEIR EQUAL.

I'M GOING TO INTERRUPT THE ORIENTATION SPEECH, WILLY. JENNY'LL GET A CHANCE TO FAMILIARIZE HERSELF WITH THE SUIT LATER.

RIGHT NOW, I WANT TO GO OVER THE SPECIFICS OF THE ASSIGNMENT.

HERE. PUERTO ROJO IS ROUGHLY 90 KILOMETERS OFF MIAMI'S COAST. ALL BOATS AND PLANES ARE THOROUGHLY INSPECTED BY CUSTOMS.

THE ONLY WAY TO GET THE M.A.X. SUIT ONTO THE ISLAND WILL BE TO FLY IT IN.

I'LL BE THERE TWO DAYS AHEAD OF YOU, POSING AS AN AUSTRALIAN REPORTER- KIND OF FEEL THINGS OUT.

THERE ARE COMMERCIAL AND CARGO FLIGHTS FROM THE STATES GOING IN REGULARLY. THEY'RE THE ONLY THINGS ALLOWED INTO THEIR AIR SPACE. EVERYTHING ELSE GETS BLASTED OUT OF THE SKY, NO QUESTIONS ASKED.

"SO, JENNY, YOU'LL FLY DIRECTLY UNDER THE BELLY OF ONE OF THOSE FLIGHTS, UNDER THE COVER OF DARK. THEIR RADAR SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DISTINGUISH YOU FROM THE PLANE ITSELF."

"A MILE INTO THE INTERIOR, JUST THE MOUNTAINS YOU'LL BE OUT OF THE RANGE OF RADAR DETECTION."

PHEW! FINALLY OVER LA TOGAÑA FOREST. MY ENTIRE BODY IS ACHING FROM THE FLIGHT.

GOT TO HAND IT TO WILLY, THOUGH- THIS SUIT HANDLES LIKE A DREAM. WELL BALANCED, RESPONSIVE...

...AND THE JET PACK HAS AN AUTOMATIC THROTTLE TO SLOW DOWN THE FLOW OF FUEL AS I GO INTO A LANDING.

EVEN MANAGED TO CLEAR THE TREETOPS WITHOUT GETTING TANGLED IN THE VINES.

NOW LET'S SEE IF OUR MR. DEERE REMEMBERED TO PLANT THE HOMING BEACON IN THIS HIDE-OUT I'M TO FIND. THE LAST OPERATIVES USED IT FOR A TRANSMITTING BASE WITHOUT BEING DISCOVERED...

BEEP BEEP BEEP

...IT SHOULD SERVE AS A GOOD PLACE TO WAREHOUSE THIS SUIT AWAY FROM PRYING EYES.

BEEP BEEP

GOOD. THE SIGNAL'S COMING IN STRONG.

WITHIN A MILE'S MARCH...

MUST BE THE PLACE. I ALWAYS THOUGHT SECRET AGENTS LUXURIATED IN ELEGANT HOTEL ROOMS. BUT NOOOOO...

...I HAVE TO SETTLE FOR A STAGE SET FROM A JOHNY WEISS/MULLER MOVIE.

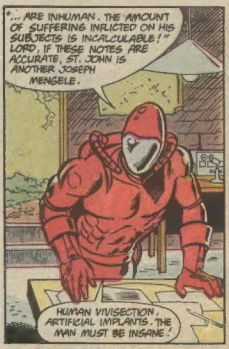
WILLY WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET ME HERE, BUT THE CABIN'S DESERTED. ABSENT MINDED PROFESSORS- NEVER COUNT ON 'EM.

WELL, I COULD USE A CHANCE TO REST UP. THAT'S ONE GOOD THING ABOUT THIS PLACE...

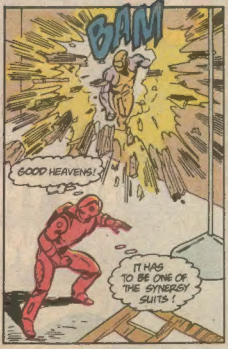
...THERE SHOULD BE PLENTY OF PRIVACY.

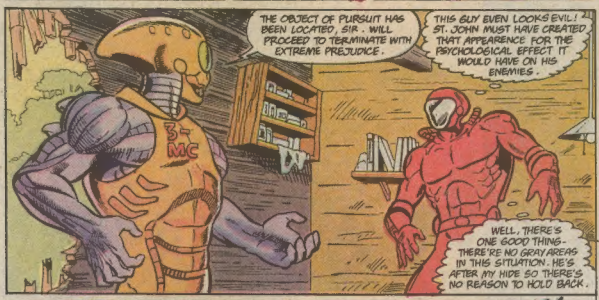
NOT AS MUCH AS YOU MIGHT HAVE ANTICIPATED, MY DEAR.

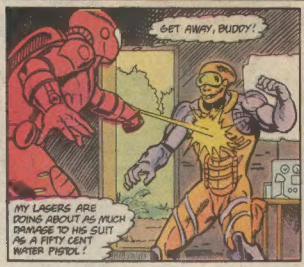
IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL MORE IDIOTS FROM THE STATES CAME TO CAUSE ME GRIEF. BUT I NEVER THOUGHT THEY WOULD COME BEARING GIFTS. AND A M.A.X. SUIT AT THAT.

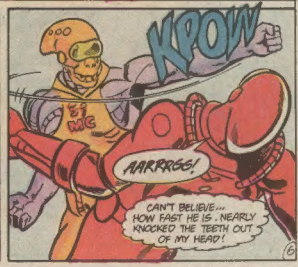

"... ARE INHUMAN. THE AMOUNT OF SUFFERING INFLICTED ON HIS SUBJECTS IS INCALCULABLE!" LORD, IF THESE NOTES ARE ACCURATE, ST. JOHN IS ANOTHER JOSEPH MENGELE.
HUMAN VIVISECTION. ARTIFICIAL IMPLANTS. THE MAN MUST BE INSANE!

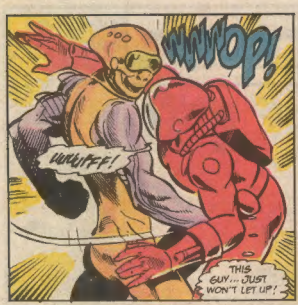
BUT HE OPERATES BEYOND THE REACH...
HUH? THE SOUND OF RUSHING WIND... GROWING LOUDER! SOMETHING DAMN FAST IS HEADING STRAIGHT FOR-


BAM
GOOD HEAVENS!
IT HAS TO BE ONE OF THE SYNERGY SUITS!

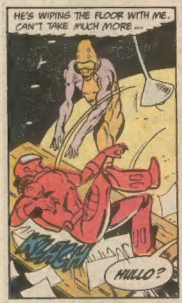

THE OBJECT OF PURSUIT HAS BEEN LOCATED, SIR. WILL PROCEED TO TERMINATE WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE.
THIS GUY EVEN LOOKS EVIL! ST. JOHN MUST HAVE CREATED THAT APPEARENCE FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT IT WOULD HAVE ON HIS ENEMIES.
WELL, THERE'S ONE GOOD THING- THERE'RE NO GRAY AREAS IN THIS SITUATION. HE'S AFTER MY HIDE SO THERE'S NO REASON TO HOLD BACK.

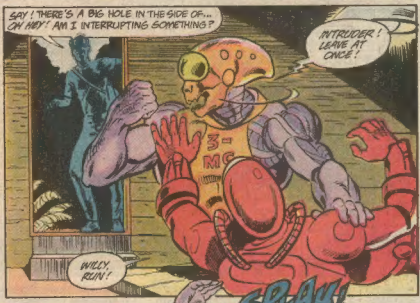

GET AWAY, BUDDY!
MY LASERS ARE DOING ABOUT AS MUCH DAMAGE TO HIS SUIT AS A FIFTY CENT WATER PISTOL!

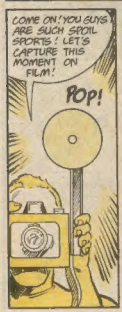

KPOW
AARRRGS!
CAN'T BELIEVE... HOW FAST HE IS. NEARLY KNOCKED THE TEETH OUT OF MY HEAD!


WHOOP!
WHUFFF!
THIS GUY... JUST WON'T LET UP!

...THOUGHT THIS SUIT COULD STAND A CHARGE BY A REAL LEVIATHAN? BUT THAT LAST PUNCH NEARLY PUT ME AWAY!

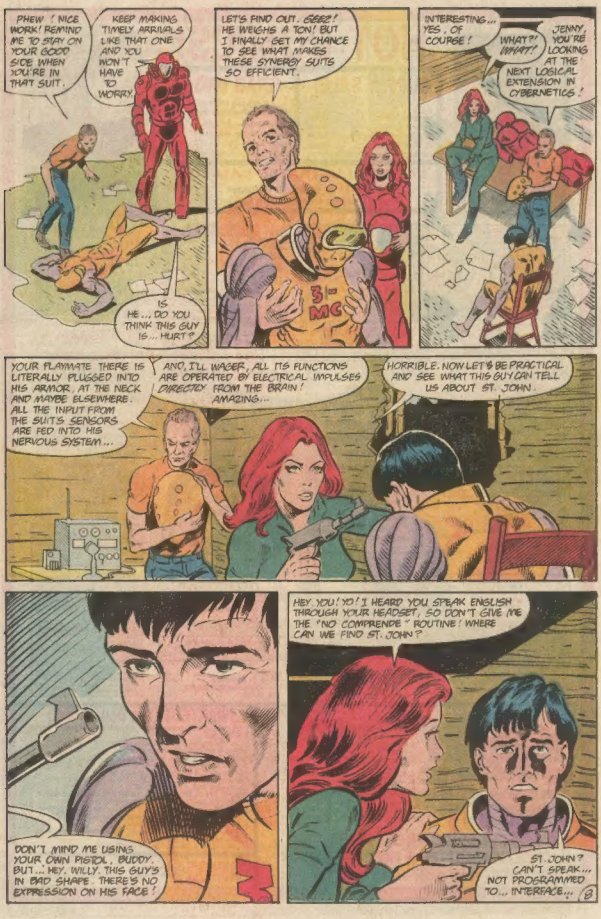

HE'S WIPING THE FLOOR WITH ME. CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE...
HULLO?


SAY! THERE'S A BIG HOLE IN THE SIDE OF... OH MY! AM I INTERRUPTING SOMETHING?
INTRUDER! LEAVE AT ONCE!
WILLY, RUN!


COME ON! YOU GUYS ARE SUCH SPOIL SPORTS! LET'S CAPTURE THIS MOMENT ON FILM!
POP!

MARRRS! MY EARS!

SPLAK!
THIS IS YOUR CHANCE, MS. SWENSEN! MAKE THIS PUNCH COUNT!


PHEW ! NICE WORK! REMIND ME TO STAY ON YOUR GOOD SIDE WHEN YOU'RE IN THAT SUIT.
KEEP MAKING TIMELY ARRIVALS LIKE THAT ONE AND YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY.
IS HE... DO YOU THINK THIS GUY IS... HURT?
LET'S FIND OUT. SEE!! HE WEIGHS A TON! BUT I FINALLY GET MY CHANCE TO SEE WHAT MAKES THESE SYNERGY SUITS SO EFFICIENT.
3-MC
INTERESTING... YES, OF COURSE!
WHAT?! WHAT?!
JENNY, YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE NEXT LOGICAL EXTENSION IN CYBERNETICS!
YOUR PLAYMATE THERE IS LITERALLY PLUGGED INTO HIS ARMOR, AT THE NECK AND MAYBE ELSEWHERE. ALL THE INPUT FROM THE SUIT'S SENSORS ARE FED INTO HIS NERVOUS SYSTEM...
AND, I'LL WAGER, ALL ITS FUNCTIONS ARE OPERATED BY ELECTRICAL IMPULSES DIRECTLY FROM THE BRAIN! AMAZING...
HORRIBLE. NOW LET'S BE PRACTICAL AND SEE WHAT THIS GUY CAN TELL US ABOUT ST. JOHN.
DON'T MIND ME USING YOUR OWN PISTOL, BUDDY, BUT... HEY, WILLY. THIS GUY'S IN BAD SHAPE. THERE'S NO EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE!
HEY, YOU! YO! I HEARD YOU SPEAK ENGLISH THROUGH YOUR HEADSET, SO DON'T GIVE ME THE "NO COMPRENDE" ROUTINE! WHERE CAN WE FIND ST. JOHN?
ST. JOHN? CAN'T SPEAK... NOT PROGRAMMED TO... INTERFACE...

HE MIGHT BE IN SHOCK, YOU--
OPERATIVE 3-MC! CEASE CURRENT INTERCOURSE IMMEDIATELY! RETURN TO HOMEBASE WITHOUT DELAY!
OH NO YOU DON'T, JACK! I'M NOT THROUGH WITH YOU YET!
I'M GOING TO COUNT TO THREE, HEAR? AND IF YOU DON'T LOOSEN YOUR TONGUE BY THEN, I'LL DO IT FOR YOU.
SOT IT? ONE... TWO... COME ON! TALK! TWO AND A HALF. WILDY, HE'S BEGINNING TO SWEAT TWO AND TWO THIRDS...
BLAST! IT'S NO USE. I CAN'T EVEN SUSTAIN A BLUFF. HE STARTS LOOKING SCARED AND I FEEL GUILTY!
YOU... ARE NOT GOING TO... SHOOT ME?
NO. JUST GET OUT, WILL YA?
I... WAS READY TO KILL YOU... AND YOU'RE LETTING ME FREE?
YEAH. THEY HAVE A WORD FOR IT BACK IN THE STATES, PAL. THEY CALL IT COMPASSION.
IF YOU OR ST. JOHN HAD ANYTHING LIKE A HUMAN HEART BEATING INSIDE YOUR CHEST, YOU'D KNOW THE MEANING OF THE WORD!
TAKING A STEP AWAY FROM THE DOORWAY, 3-MC ACTIVATES THE JETS HOUSED IN HIS BOOTS AND RISES SWIFTLY THROUGH THE JUNGLE'S GREEN CANOPY.
3-MC
WELL, THERE HE GOES. OUR BEST CHANCE AT GETTING THE UPPER HAND ON ST. JOHN. WHAT A PAIR WE ARE!
4

I THINK WE'D BETTER START LOOKING FOR ANOTHER LINE OF WORK. MAYBE REPAIRMEN OR SOMETHING.

I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU. UNEMPLOYMENT IS THE LEAST OF OUR CONCERNS RIGHT NOW. THE SCUFFLE YOU HAD LOOSENED A BOOKSHELF. SEE?

WE'VE BEEN ON TV FOR THE LAST TEN MINUTES, COURTESY OF ST JOHN NO DOUBT.

I WAS A FOOL NOT TO HAVE SEARCHED THE PLACE FOR BUGS. EAT THIS, ST JOHN YOU PARA.

AH, MISS SWENSEN. YOU LOOK SO LOVELY WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY.

ASSSSST

WELL, THEY KNOW I'M ON TO THEM NOW. BUT IT HARDLY MATTERS. THEIR SHEER INCOMPETENCE WILL BETRAY THEM AGAIN. IT'S ONLY A QUESTION OF TIME...

DAWN LIGHTS THE EASTERN SKY AS WE'VE REMITTED LANDWARD. FINDS ITS WAY THROUGH THE HEART OF LA TOMANA JUNGLE.

JENNY TRIES TO NAP IN THE BACK SEAT. BUT HER SLEEP IS TROUBLED. BY THE BAD ROADS, OVER WHICH THEY PASS, AND BY HER OWN BAD DREAMS.

"SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHERE THEY'RE HEADING. SHE ONLY HOPES THEY HAVE EVADED ST JOHN'S MALE VOLENT SCRUTINY.

DEAK FINDS THEM APPROACHING A SMALL SERVICE VILLAGE.

DESPITE THE SQUALOR OF CHILDREN LOST IN PLAY AND MEN FINISHING THEIR DAY'S WORK, A SENSE OF GLOOM HANGS OVER THIS TOWN...

JORGE'S

"HIS IS SIRELL." "YES SIRELL."

WE'RE ON THE JOB TWENTY FOUR HOURS AND WE'VE MUFFED OUR FIRST LEAD AND LOST THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE! TO TOP IT OFF WE'RE BOTH BONE TIRED AND FUNCTIONING AT ABOUT 25%
WELL I'M GLAD TO SEE THAT ALL THIS HASN'T DAMPENED YOUR BUOYANT SPIRITS. SERIOUSLY. THINGS AREN'T THAT BAD
ST. JOHN ISN'T OMNIPOTENT. IF THAT ONE BOZO YOU FOUGHT IS ANY EXAMPLE, HIS MEN HAVE NO REAL WILL TO SERVE HIM. WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO EXPLOIT THAT WEAKNESS
MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT, BUT I-
MAYBE DEPOS? CAN'T THEY READ THE SIGN OUTSIDE? I'VE CLOSED FOR THE NIGHT!
HEY! OPEN UP IN THERE!
WILLY!
STAY COOL GIRL
WHAT DO YOU WANT? CAN'T YOU-
WE'RE LOOKING FOR TWO AMERICANOS A GIRL AND A WHITEHAIRED GUY. WE'RE THINKING MAYBE YOU'VE SEEN THEM
OH NO I-
WE'RE THINKING MAYBE YOU HAVE CAUSE THERE'S A JEEP PARKED OUTSIDE THAT NO ONE IN THIS VILLAGE COULD AFFORD
NO, I'M CLOSED FOR THE NIGHT. THEY MUST BE SOME OTHER PLACE
WE'RE THINKING MAYBE ST. JOHN WOULD BE VERY ANNOYED IF HE KNEW YOU WERE LYING TO US, SO MAYBE WE'LL JUST CHECK FOR OURSELVES
NO! THE AMERICANS AREN'T HERE!
INSIDE BENEDJO!

AND IF YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR VITAL ORGANS INTACT, KEEP OUT OF OUR WAY!

HEY, PEPE' HE WASN'T LYING TO US THE PLACE REALLY IS EMPTY ST JOHN ISN'T GOING TO LIKE THIS!

THEY COULD HAVE SLIPPED OUT BACK LET'S CHECK

ALL RIGHT, MY FRIEND YOU ARE IN THE CLEAR FOR NOW BUT IF WE FIND YOU VE HELPED THOSE TWO IN ANY WAY... WE'LL MAKE SURE YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN ARE WELL PROVIDED FOR

A MINUTE AFTER THE INQUISITORS LEAVE.

GOD AND I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER BEEN SO SCARED!

WE .. WE OWE YOU OUR LIVES AMIGO YOUR WARNINGS GAVE US JUST ENOUGH TIME TO HIDE

IT

THOSE THUGS RUN THIS PLACE WITH A HEAVY HAND DON'T THEY?

YOU PUT YOURSELF IN REAL DANGER BY HELPING US WHY?

ISN'T IT OBVIOUS? ST JOHN S GOT HIS MEN IN EVERY VILLAGE ON THE ISLAND. YOU CAN'T BREATHE WITHOUT WORD GETTING BACK TO HIM.

WHY IS HE SO INTENT ON MAKING YOUR LIVES MISERABLE?

HE'S A DEVIL IF EVER ONE EXISTED! WHEN HE CAME TO PUERTO ROJO A FEW YEARS AGO, NO ONE THOUGHT MUCH OF IT...

BUT SOON CHILDREN BEGAN TO DISAPPEAR ON THE VILLAGE STREETS. NO ONE HAS FOUND ANY SOLID EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM BUT WE'RE SURE HE'S RESPONSIBLE! MY FIFTEEN YEAR OLD BROTHER - MY OWN TWIN BROTHER ENRIQUE - WAS ONE OF THE DISAPPEARED TOO!

ST JOHN TRIED TO ASSUAGE OUR DISTRUST WITH GIFTS. AMERICAN CLOTHES, LUXURY BUT IT DIDN'T WORK. OUR HATRED AND SUSPICION OF HIM ONLY GREW ..

"SOON RUMORS BEGAN. RUMORS ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO THE KIDS"

SOME SAID THAT HE WAS KEEPING THEM APART FROM ALL OTHER HUMANS AND TURNING THEM INTO MACHINES! "INTO ROBOTS!" IS SAID THAT SOME NIGHTS YOU CAN HEAR THEM HOWL IN PAIN FOR MILES AROUND HIS FORTRESS AS HE TURNS THEIR FLESH INTO METAL.

"I'VE BEEN THERE MYSELF. I'VE HEARD THOSE POOR SOULS CRYING OUT!"

OH LORD! HOW YOU MUST HATE ST JOHN!

IF ONLY I KNEW OF SOME WAY TO RESIST HIM

FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT, JORGE. WE'RE NOT SO KEEN ON THIS FELLOW OURSELVES. BEEN LOOKING FOR A WAY TO MAKE THINGS A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR HIM

CAN YOU TAKE US TO THIS "FORTRESS" OF HIS, AS YOU CALL IT?

OF COURSE! YOU ARE ALL BUT THERE ALREADY.

IT'S BUILT ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF AN OLD CHURCH ON THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE

WILLY! OF ALL THE DUMB LUCK! WE STUMBLED RIGHT ONTO IT!

OLD GIRL... I HAVE A BIT OF A CONFESSION TO MAKE HERE. WE WEREN'T DRIVING BLIND ALL DAY. I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF PLANTING THE HOMING BEACON FROM THE HIDEOUT ONTO 9-MC'S ARMOR BEFORE WE LET HIM GO. I FOLLOWED THE SIGNAL STRAIGHT HERE

"NO. LET'S NOT WASTE ANY MORE TIME. LET'S FIND ST. JOHN BEFORE HE FINDS US AGAIN"

"WILLY, HOW COULD YOU? WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US"

"WELL, I'VE NOTICE YOU'RE A BIT OF A MOTHER, HONEY. FIGURED YOU'D JUST GET UPSET AND RUSH OFF AFTER THAT 9-MC GUY WITHOUT A PLAN OF STRATEGY"

"THANKS FOR THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, DEERE"

"WELL, AM I RIGHT OR AM I?"

"LET'S SAY I WON'T PRESS THE ISSUE RIGHT NOW"

THREE MILES OF ROUGH CRUSING LATER

THIS IS AS FAR AS WE SHOULD GO. THE PERIMETER OF THE FORTRESS IS MONITORED BY SURVEILLANCE DEVICES, AS WELL AS DOGS AND SENTRIES

SO HOW DO WE GET INSIDE?

THE OLD CHURCH WAS BUILT OVER A NETWORK OF CATACOMBS. I USED TO EXPLORE THEM AS A KID. WE'VE STOPPED RIGHT BY ONE OF THE ENTRANCES.

WITH LUCK, ONE OF THE TUNNELS SHOULD LEAD US INSIDE

I'M BEGINNING TO FEEL A LITTLE NERVOUS ABOUT THIS. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE GETTING OURSELVES INTO

YOU'VE COME THIS FAR, JEN. YOU'D HATE YOURSELF IF YOU BACKED OUT NOW

YOU KNOW, IT BUGS ME THAT YOU'VE GOT ME PEGGED SO WELL. LET'S PULL OUT THE ARMOR. I HAVE A HUNCH IT'S GOING TO GET A REAL WORKOUT TONIGHT

NO! MADRE DE DIOS... THAT METAL SUIT... IT IS JUST LIKE THE SKIN I'VE SEEN ON ST. JOHN'S MONSTROSITIES!

WHOA, JORGE. THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE...

NO, THERE ISN'T. NOT IF YOU'RE WILLING TO USE THAT ARMOR. MAYBE YOUR PURPOSES ARE DIFFERENT THAN ST. JOHN'S, BUT YOU'RE STILL PART OF THE HAVE EVIL

YOUR MIND WORSHIPS PROGRESS AND MACHINES, NOT ANY GOD I CAN UNDERSTAND!

GO AHEAD! PRAYS ST. JOHN. IN THE LONG RUN, I'M NOT SURE IT MATTERS WHICH OF YOU WINS!

JORGE! WAIT! WE NEED YOU

SAVE IT, JENNY. HE'S GONE

YES... BUT HIS LEAVING WOULDN'T HURT SO MUCH... IF I WAS SURE HE WAS WRONG

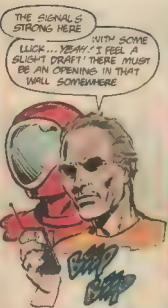
WELL, WAIT TO SIT DOWN OVER CAPPUCINO AND TALK ABOUT IT?

MAYBE START AN AFFINITY GROUP IN THE MORNING?

OKAY. CAN THE SARCASM. I REALIZE THERE'S NO ROOM FOR REFLECTION WHILE WE'RE IN THE FIELD...

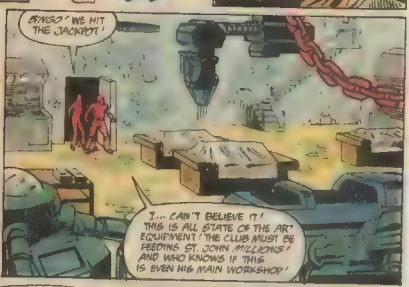
BUT I'M NEVER GOING TO SURRENDER MY RIGHT TO DECIDE WHAT'S RIGHT AND WRONG

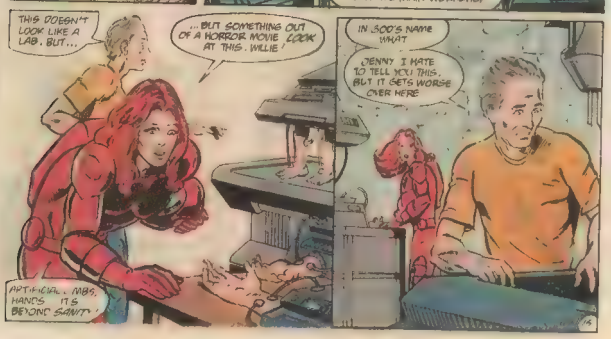
SLOW DOWN THERE! I DON'T HAVE A FLASHLIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF MY FOREHEAD LIKE YOU DO


THE SIGNAL'S STRONG HERE
WITH SOME LUCK... YEAH! I FEEL A SLIGHT DRAFT! THERE MUST BE AN OPENING IN THAT WALL SOMEWHERE

IT'S GOT TO BE... THERE! IT HASN'T BEEN USED IN DECADES, I'M SURE, BUT THIS CREVICE MUST INDICATE A PASSAGEWAY

STAND ASIDE THEN, AND LET ME PUT THIS SUIT TO SOME GOOD USE


BINGO! WE HIT THE JACKPOT!
I... CAN'T BELIEVE IT! THIS IS ALL STATE OF THE ART EQUIPMENT! THE CLUB MUST BE FEEDING ST. JOHN MILLIONS! AND WHO KNOWS IF THIS IS EVEN HIS MAIN WORKSHOP!


THIS DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A LAB. BUT...
...BUT SOMETHING OUT OF A HORROR MOVIE LOOK AT THIS. WILLIE!
ARTIFICIAL, MAN, HANDS IT'S BEYOND SANITY
IN GOD'S NAME WHAT
JENNY I HATE TO TELL YOU THIS, BUT IT GETS WORSE OVER HERE

YOU NEVER KNEW HER, JEN, BUT HER NAME WAS CELIA CLIFF, ONE OF OUR BEST.

I CAN'T FIGURE OUT THE FUNCTION OF THE DEVICE SHE'S STRAPPED INTO. BUT THE IMPLANTS ARE CRUDE, HASTILY DONE.

IS SHE DEAD?

THERE'S A PULSE, BUT IT'S WEAK. I GET THE IMPRESSION THAT SHE'S NOT EVEN UNCONSCIOUS, TECHNICALLY. I SEE HER EYELIDS FLUTTERING.

...NOT UNCONSCIOUS...

...AM OVER HERE.

WHAT IN THE NAME OF...! CELIA!?

...HARD TO GRASP... ISN'T IT? I ... I AM THE FINAL STEP... OF SYNERGY.. ST JOHN'S PRIZE GUINEA PIG... MY BRAIN DIRECTLY CONTROLS THIS ... ROBOT

WHAT IT SEES AND HEARS GOES DIRECTLY INTO MY... CEREBRUM

BUT HE'S... PUSHING AHEAD TOO FAST... DESIGN'T CARE HOW MUCH SUFFERING HE CAUSES

...HELP ME

CELIA DON'T TRY TO SPEAK ANYMORE. YOU'RE TOO WEAK. I'LL TRY TO DETACH YOUR--

MR DEERE, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO DO ANYTHING EVER AGAIN!

YOUR CONCERN FOR MISS CLIFF IS QUITE TOUCHING. REALLY! I'D FORGOTTEN THERE WERE STILL PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD CAPABLE OF SUCH FEELINGS

ST JOHN, WHATEVER GRASP YOU HAD ON REASON IN YOUR YOUNGER DAYS, YOU'VE ENTIRELY LOST!

OH, YOU CERTAINLY KNOW HOW TO INJURE A MAN! AND TALKING OF INSULT! I MUST SAY I WAS LIVID WHEN BYARS RETURNED WITH THAT CRUDE HOMING DEVICE ON HIS SUIT!

HOW COULD YOU THINK SUCH A CLUMSY TRICK WOULD GET PAST ME HONESTLY!

I ALLOWED YOU BUNGLERS TO GET THIS FAR FOR ONE REASON ALONE

IT SAVED ME THE EFFORT OF SENDING MORE MEN OUT TO FETCH THE M.A.Y. SUIT YOU WEAR MISS SWENSEN

IT APPEARS A BIT PRIMITIVE BUT A CLOSE EXAMINATION SHOULD STILL PROVE REWARDING

FIRST THOUGH, I MUST SEE IT IN ACTION ONCE MORE. IF YOU WOULD DO ME THE HONOR, MADAME...

STOP THIS CRAP, ST JOHN! IF--

I BELIEVE YOU'LL REMEMBER 3-XX, MISS SWENSON. HIS INITIAL ATTEMPT TO SUBDUE YOU QUITE DISAPPOINTED ME. THIS TIME I'VE PROVIDED HIM WITH ASSISTANCE. SO I ANTICIPATE FAR BETTER RESULTS.

OH, NO! TWO OF THEM! BARELY HELD MY OWN AGAINST ONE OF THEM LAST TIME

YOU LOOK A BIT PERTURBED MY DEAR. HAVE YOU SO LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN YOURSELF?

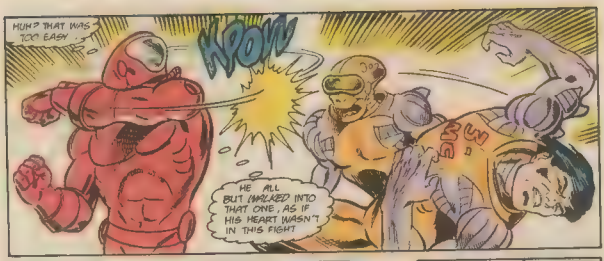
EMOTIONS, FEAR, SYMPATHY--THEY ONLY GET IN THE WAY. YOU'VE NOTICED. I'M SURE, THAT 3-MC BARELY REGISTERS ANY SIGN OF EMOTIONS. THAT TOOK YEARS OF CONDITIONING, BUT IT WAS WELL WORTH THE TROUBLE

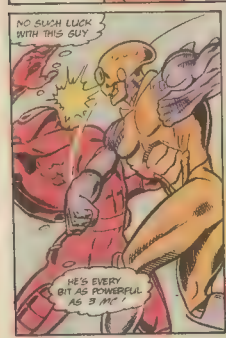
ONE RARELY FEELS THE LOSS OF ONE'S SOUL AND IT MAKES ONE OPERATE EVER SO MUCH MORE... EFFICIENTLY

ALL RIGHT, ST JOHN, YOU'LL GET YOUR LITTLE SHOW.

..BUT WHEN I'M THROUGH WITH THESE TWO, I'LL GIVE YOU A LESSON IN FEELING--FEELING PAIN!

WHO AM I KIDDING? I'M OUT OF MY DEPTH HERE AND ST JOHN KNOWS IT!


HUH? THAT WAS TOO EASY
WOW
HE ALL BUT WALKED INTO THAT ONE, AS IF HIS HEART WASN'T IN THIS FIGHT

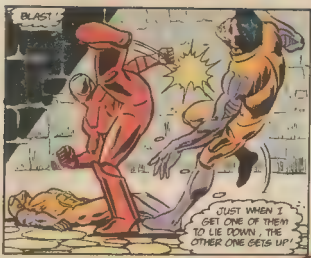

NO SUCH LUCK WITH THIS GUY
HE'S EVERY BIT AS POWERFUL AS I'M!

GOOD HE'S MOVING SLOW, THINKS I'M OFF BALANCE
THUMP
HOPE THIS ONE HURTS, BUSTER!

NOW IF I CAN PRESS THE ADVANT··
AAAAAARRRG!
KRACK

OH, MISS SWENSEN! A LITTLE MORE EFFORT PLEASE
DON'T MAKE IT TOO EASY ON MY MEN
ST JOHN'S TOTALLY ABSORBED IN HIS HIGH-TECH COCKFIGHT. HE DOESN'T SEEM TO NOTICE THAT I'VE BEEN EDGING NEARER TO HIM...

ONE MORE STEP AND I'LL BE WITHIN REACH··
MR DEERE, I SUGGEST YOU REMAIN EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE
WHY JEOPARDIZE THE FEW MINUTES YOU HAVE LEFT TO LIVE?

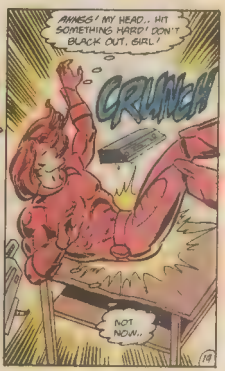

BLAST!
JUST WHEN I GET ONE OF THEM TO LIE DOWN, THE OTHER ONE GETS UP!

THIS ISN'T THE SAME MAN I FOUGHT BEFORE. HE'S HESITANT UNSURE OF HIMSELF.
WITHOUT HIS HELMET ON I CAN SEE IT IN HIS FACE. HE'S REALLY TRYING TO PULL HIS PUNCHES
SOK

HE COULD BE ONE OF MY OLD STUDENTS. HIS FACE IS SO FAMILIAR!
IN FACT I DO KNOW THAT FACE! OF COURSE! IT ALL MAKES SEN--

OOOOFFF!
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER THAN TO LET MY THOUGHTS DISTRACT ME FROM THE FIGHT
AT THIS POINT, I'M NOT SURE FIGHTING IS THE SOLUTION. MAYBE I CAN REACH HIM ANOTHER WAY...

SHE-HULK, STOP! LET ME TALK TO YOU!
NO GOOD! HE'S NOT LISTENING!


AWKES! MY HEAD.. HIT SOMETHING HARD! DON'T BLACK OUT, GIRL!
CRUNCH
NOT NOW...

STOP! YOU'RE NOT A KILLER! YOUR NAME'S ENRIQUE, YOU'VE A TWIN BROTHER JORGE, DON'T YOU?
I... YES! MY NAME IS... ENRIQUE...
I CAN SEE IT IN YOUR EYES. YOU CAN'T HELP BUT REMEMBER NOW!
E-AC-1, PAY NO ATTENTION TO HER PRATTLE. DO YOUR JOB!
SOMETHING HAPPENED TO YOU AFTER OUR FIGHT IN THE SHACK. YOU LOOK AS THOUGH YOU'RE WAKING FROM A BAD DREAM.
YOU ARE THE FIRST PERSON... TO CALL ME BY NAME... IN YEARS... TO SPEAK TO ME... AS A HUMAN...
IDIOT! YOU'RE LETTING THREE YEARS OF CAREFUL PROGRAMMING BE UNDONE BY SOME MICROCEPHALIC FOOL! COMPASSION IS A WEAKNESS! YOU MUST--
"COMPASSION"... THAT'S THE WORD SHE USED...
MASTER ST. JOHN... I'M CONFUSED... DON'T WANT TO HURT HER...
I CAN'T THINK, I NEED TIME--
BANG
THEN, I'M AFRAID, I MUST TERMINATE OUR RELATIONSHIP. PERMANENTLY.
I FEEL NO REGRETS WITH REGARD TO YOU TWO DOLTS, HOWEVER!
YOU'VE COST ME A PRIZE SUBJECT...
ST. JOHN, NO...
YOUR ENTREATIES FALL ON DEAF EARS. YOUR DEMISE WILL NOT BE A PARTICULARLY COLORFUL ONE, BUT I'M THROUGH WITH GAMES.
YES, ST. JOHN... YOU ARE THROUGH...

AAAAHH! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! YOU'RE... ALIVE!
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU BELIEVE ANYMORE, YOU MONSTER!
MY ARM! YOU'RE CRUSHING IT!

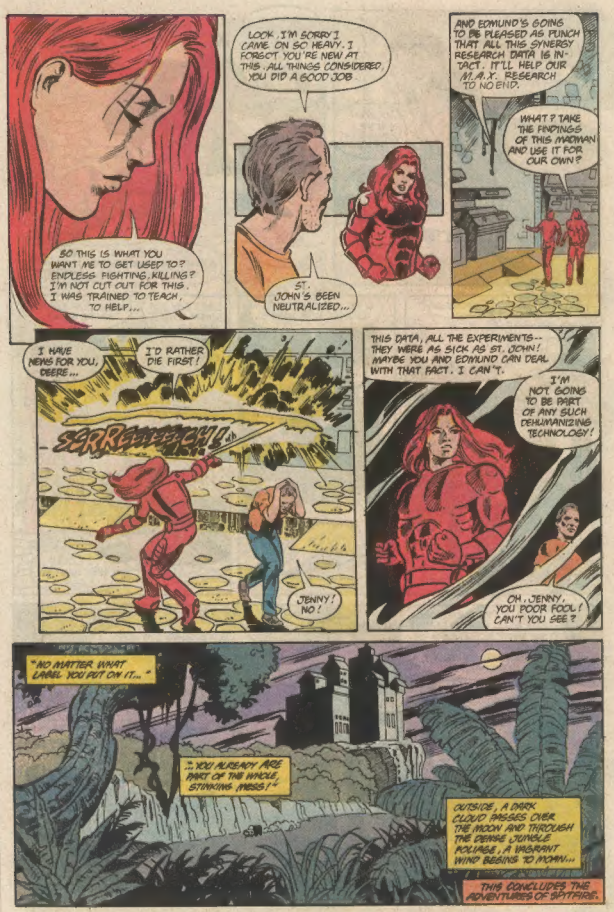
FOR PITY'S SAKE! LET GO!
WILLY! THE GUN!
DON'T COACH ME, WOMAN! YOU COULD HAVE USED YOUR LASERS...

...BUT YOU DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF KILLING, DO YOU?
UUUUGG!
BANG

IT ALL CAME UNDONE SO FAST. HOW...HOW?...

CAN'T SAY I'M SORRY TO SEE HIM GO.
WILLY, I'M SORRY. YOU'RE RIGHT...
I COULD HAVE USED MY LASERS.

SAVE IT. IT'S OVER NOW... BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO LEARN IT'S A DIRTY WORLD. EVEN THE GUYS WEARING WHITE HAVE TO GET THEIR HANDS MUDDY SOMETIMES.
CELIA'S DEAD. I'M NOT SURPRISED. THE STRAIN WAS MUCH MORE THAN SHE COULD HANDLE.
ENRIQUE... GONE ALSO.


SO THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT ME TO GET USED TO? ENDLESS FIGHTING, KILLING? I'M NOT CUT OUT FOR THIS. I WAS TRAINED TO TEACH, TO HELP...
LOOK, I'M SORRY I CAME ON SO HEAVY. I FORGOT YOU'RE NEW AT THIS. ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, YOU DID A GOOD JOB.
ST. JOHN'S BEEN NEUTRALIZED...
AND EDMUND'S GOING TO BE PLEASED AS PUNCH THAT ALL THIS SYNERGY RESEARCH DATA IS INTACT. IT'LL HELP OUR M.A.K. RESEARCH TO NO END.
WHAT? TAKE THE FINDINGS OF THIS MADMAN AND USE IT FOR OUR OWN?
I HAVE NEWS FOR YOU, DEERE...
I'D RATHER DIE FIRST!
SCRREEEECHH
JENNY! NO!
THIS DATA, ALL THE EXPERIMENTS-- THEY WERE AS SICK AS ST. JOHN! MAYBE YOU AND EDMUND CAN DEAL WITH THAT FACT. I CAN'T.
I'M NOT GOING TO BE PART OF ANY SUCH DEHUMANIZING TECHNOLOGY!
OH, JENNY, YOU POOR FOOL! CAN'T YOU SEE?
"NO MATTER WHAT LAURL YOU PUT ON IT..."
"... YOU ALREADY ARE PART OF THE WHOLE, STINKING MESS!"
OUTSIDE, A DARK CLOUD PASSES OVER THE MOON AND THROUGH THE DENSE JUNGLE FOLIAGE, A VAGRANT WIND BEGINS TO MOAN...
THIS CONCLUDES THE ADVENTURES OF SPITFIRE.

universe news

ITEM: When the Marvel Universe was still aborning some twenty-six years ago, not all of its original creations immediately grabbed hold of the public fancy. The astonishing Ant-Man and the Human Torch lost their solo strips within a few years, and the incredible Hulk was cancelled after a mere *six issues* (only to return several years later as a co-feature). Now history is repeating itself in Marvel's New Universe. Four of the eight original New Universe titles have failed to catch on with a big enough segment of the buying public to warrant their continuation at this time. Those books which are being cancelled with the issues on sale this month are . . . MERC, NIGHTMASK, KICKERS INC., and CODENAME: SPITFIRE. While we've tried to provide some sense of resolution to the final issues of these titles, you have not seen the last of these books' characters (with one exception, which shall be apparent in the last issue of the title). Expect the unfortunate few who have lost their magazines to appear from time to time in the remaining New Universe titles, as well as certain new New Universe titles now in the planning stages. That's right, Marvel has not wavered in its commitment to its bold New Universe. We are simply retrenching, taking stock of what you, the true editors of our books, have told us about the merits and failings of our line, and we're coming up with new ways to make the New Universe the place to find the kind of stories you can't read anywhere else. To help us accomplish this, we've placed all of the New Universe titles under the auspices of *one editor*, a man who deserves an item all to himself. So, without further ado . . .

ITEM: Effective this very month, humble *Howard Mackie*, former managing editor for special publications, will take the editorial helm of all the New Universe titles — namely, D.P. 7, PSI-FORCE, JUSTICE, and STAR BRAND. Consolidating all of the books under a single editor's auspices will help coordinate the books' storylines so that the saga of the New Universe can unfold like never before. Howard, once known as the world's most mysterious assistant editor, approaches the task with the unbridled enthusiasm he is known for, and promises that the New Universe: Year Two will blow the socks off everyone's expectations (that is, if your expectations wear socks!). We'll profile Howard in this space next month!

ITEM: The entries are still pouring in on our New Universe slogan contest, and we're nowhere near sorting through the stack and determining our favorite. So in the meantime, here are more of your candidates for Official Sloganhood:

"Ours is the New Universe"
— Mike D'Ascenza, Toronto, Canada

"New way" "I new it!"
— Kevin Brittain, Haworth, OK

"One with the New Universe!"
— Robbie Rinto, Minerva, OH

"New News is Good News"
— Lowel Davison, Easthampton, MA

"New Universe: Get Real"
— Richard Horsman, Pittsburgh, PA

"I saw the White Event"
— Beth Hlabse, Richmond Heights, OH

"It's only the beginning"
— Mike Kamper, Western Springs, IL

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

If the New Universe takes place in "real time," how come a month does not pass between issues of D.P. 7?

"My understanding of the real time aspect of the New Universe books is that a year passes in the comic for every year that passes in real life, not that there is a month in between every issue. By about the end of the first year of D.P. 7's publication, a year has indeed passed for the characters (actually by the end of #13). I felt that crucial things were happening within the first few weeks of the Displaced Paranormals' escape from the Clinic that I did not want to gloss over, so I covered that period in depth. I had to allow several month-long time gaps to make up for that at the end of the first year."

— Mark Gruenwald, D.P. 7 writer

"New for You"
— Sean O'Reilly, Hudson, OH

"Unleash the Universe"
— Bert Gall, Griffin, GA

"Travel through the New Universe"
— Emiliano Amaro, Bronx, NY

"Until the next White Event"
Phill Barnes, Orlando, FL

"New Times, New Needs: New Universe"
— Scott Odell, no address on entry.

"Marvelously real"
— Nettie B. Hayden, Pelham, AL

"I've Got New Umania"
— Randy Ross, Port McNeill, BC, Canada

"May the New Universe Never Grow Old"
— Ernie Wiegand, Alberta, Canada

"The New Universe: Feel it around you"
— Amy L. Watts, East Peoria, IL

"The newest expansion of your imagination"
— Eric Phillips, Canastota, NY

"The New Choice"
— Anthony Sowinski, Maspeth, NY

"The New Universe is My Universe"
— Tommy Spell, Jackson, MS

"Light my Universe"
— Phil McClellin, Cald, ID

"New Rules!"
— Truitt Johnson, Clenco, MN

"A New Universe for New People"
— Brian Goodyear, Ontario, Canada

• NEW UNIVERSE CHECKLIST •

- ☐ **NIGHT MASK #12** — The end of Voodoo!
- ☐ **PSI FORCE #12** — Stasi's faith-healing power brings her in contact with a religious cult!
- ☐ **KICKERS, INC. #12** — The Kickers challenge a Canadian Hockey team!
- ☐ **MERC #12** — In a training camp for Afghan Freedom Fighters!
- ☐ **D.P. 7 #12** — Showdown at the Clinic with the ultimate Paranormal!
- ☐ **JUSTICE #12** — There is evil in this world. And now, there is Justice!
- ☐ **STAR BRAND ANNUAL #1** — Is the power of the Star Brand too much for Ken Connell to handle? It could spell death for someone he loves!
- ☐ **CODENAME: SPITFIRE #13** — Jenny goes into action — alone!
- ☐ **PSI FORCE ANNUAL #1** — Psi Force loses a member — and gains a new one! Also, find out what all the team members experienced on the day they gained their powers!